

CITY OF LINCOLN/AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN REQUEST FOR LETTERS OF INQUIRY: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The City of Lincoln invites letters of interest from organizations interested in implementing workforce development initiatives through American Rescue Plan State Fiscal Recovery Funding resources. This invitation outlines 1) an overview of Lincoln, Nebraska workforce development definitions, demands, and needs; 2) the justification for implementing workforce development initiatives; 3) goals for the effort; 4) format, timelines, process, and criteria for the letter of interest process; and 5) initial expectations for financial reporting and program oversight. Funding will be allocated on a competitive basis as outlined below.

1. Lincoln, Nebraska Workforce Development Overview

- a. Workforce Development Defined: A local workforce development system encompasses the organizations and activities that prepare people for employment, help workers advance in their careers, and ensure a skilled workforce.ⁱ
- b. Workforce Development Demand in Lincoln: Labor force availability and quality is consistently a challenge for Nebraska and Lincolnⁱⁱ. Lack of applicants, lack of work experience, poor work history, and lack of occupation specific skills are the top challenges identified by businesses in the Department of Labor annual hiring and training reportⁱⁱⁱ.
- c. Workforce Development as a Part of Lincoln Forward: The City of Lincoln promotes workforce development as a part of our “Lincoln Forward” strategy. Lincoln Forward pursues a holistic approach to our city’s economic growth and development, understanding that growth and development are not ends in themselves but rather the means by which we cultivate the good life. Lincoln Forward focuses on fostering the conditions for Lincolniters to flourish and feel secure that they can provide for their families. Fundamental to this initiative are economic and workforce development and ensuring our residents have access to enjoyable, rewarding, and financially secure careers.
- d. Workforce Development and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: The City of Lincoln promotes workforce development by leveraging the Mayor’s Office to serve as the Greater Lincoln Workforce Development Board Chief Elected Official. The Board implements the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, providing job training and skills development and support to adults, dislocated workers, and youth. The mission of the Greater Lincoln Workforce Development Board is “Empowering Nebraskans to achieve economic independence and thrive in work and life in partnership with local employers^{iv}.”

2. Justification for Investment in Workforce Development Initiatives

- a. American Rescue Plan: Workforce development and job training initiatives are a clear strategy for economic recovery in response to the coronavirus pandemic and identified as an allowable use of American Rescue Plan State and Local Fiscal Relief Funding when addressing a negative economic impact of the Covid-19 public health emergency.
 - i. *Economic Impact*: Per the American Rescue Plan State and Local Fiscal Recovery Relief Funding Interim Final Rule: “As the economy recovers, the effects of the pandemic-related recession may continue to impact households, including a risk of longer-term effects on earnings and economic potential. For example, unemployed workers, especially those who have experienced longer periods of unemployment, earn lower wages over the long term once rehired. In addition to the labor market consequences for unemployed workers, recessions can also cause longer-term economic challenges through, among other factors, damaged consumer credit scores and reduced familial and childhood wellbeing. These potential long-term economic consequences underscore the continued need for robust policy support^v.”
 - ii. *Assistance to Unemployed Workers*: This is an explicitly allowed expenditure in the American Rescue Plan State and Local Fiscal Recovery Guidance: “This includes assistance to unemployed workers, including services like job training to accelerate rehiring of unemployed workers; these services may extend to workers unemployed due to the pandemic or the resulting recession, or who were already unemployed when the pandemic began and remain so due to the negative economic impacts of the pandemic^{vi}.”
 - iii. *Assistance to Households*: Assistance to households or populations facing negative economic impacts due to COVID-19 is also an eligible use. This includes: food assistance; rent, mortgage, or utility assistance; counseling and legal aid to prevent eviction or homelessness; cash assistance (discussed below); emergency assistance for burials, home repairs, weatherization, or other needs; internet access or digital literacy assistance; or job training to address negative economic or public health impacts experienced due to a worker’s occupation or level of training.
 - iv. *Broad Worker Supports*: The Interim Final Rule permits a broad range of services to unemployed or underemployed workers and other individuals that suffered negative economic impacts from the pandemic. That can include public jobs programs, subsidized employment, combined education and on-the-job training programs, or job training to accelerate rehiring or address negative economic or public health impacts

experienced due to a worker's occupation or level of training. The broad range of permitted services can also include other employment supports, such as childcare assistance or assistance with transportation to and from a jobsite or interview^{vii}.

- b. Mayor's Economic Recovery Task Force: Workforce development and job training initiatives are directly connected to the recommendations of the Mayor's Economic Recovery Task Force.
 - i. *Mayor's Economic Recovery Task Force Recommendations*: In 2019, Mayor Gaylor Baird convened the Task Force to identify strategies for recovery. The Task Force was made up of a cross section of stakeholders in the community and made recommendations prioritizing workforce initiatives including connecting employers with local workforce resources and opportunities and upskilling and reskilling Lincoln's workforce. The Task Force prioritized strategies that are timely and implementable, locally relevant, durable, and asset driven^{viii}.
- c. Greater Lincoln Workforce Development Board Local Plan: Workforce development and job training initiatives are a clear strategy connected to the Mayor's Role as the Chief Elected Official of the Greater Lincoln Workforce Development Board.
 - i. *Local Plan Goals and Priorities*: Living wages, career pathways, inclusivity, increased awareness of workforce programs, and enhancing youth employment opportunities are all goals in the plan. Career pathways prioritized in the plan include health care, technology, advanced manufacturing, agribusiness and natural resources.

3. Goals of Lincoln, Nebraska Workforce Development Initiatives through the American Rescue Plan

- a. Economic Recovery: Economic recovery for Lincoln, Nebraska is the top priority of the Lincoln, Nebraska American Rescue Plan Workforce Development initiative. Letters of interest should identify ways in which projects identify the negative economic impact caused by the pandemic and their proposed remedy^{ix}.
- b. Advancing Living Wages: Strategies should result in opportunities that provide a living wage or prepare job seekers for a career that pays a living wage^x.
- c. Equity: Initiatives should promote equity and address "equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality^{xi}." Supporting programs located in or serving individuals in Qualified Census Tracts^{xii} and/or programs serving unemployed individuals are a priority.

- d. Alignment with City Planning: Priority will be given to projects that are related to existing City plans, priorities, and processes. Priority will also be given to projects that have a relationship with or ability to partner with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

4. Format, process, criteria, and timeline

- a. Letter of Inquiry Format: Letters of inquiry should follow the following format completely. Letters should be no more than three pages with an additional one-page budget.
 - i. A description of the existing nonprofit, public/private partnership, and/or educational entity serving people in the City of Lincoln, Nebraska as well as existing partnerships or relationships with the City of Lincoln and related experience providing workforce development related programming.
 - ii. The physical location of the applicant and whether or not they are located in or primarily serve individuals in a qualifying census tract, including supporting data.
 - iii. Letters of interest should identify ways in which projects identify the negative economic impact caused by the pandemic and their proposed remedy.
 - iv. How the proposed program achieves the goals in section three.
 - v. How the proposed program aligns with the eligible funding priorities of the American Rescue plan outlined in section 2 a.
 - vi. Specific goals of the proposed project and a summary scope of work.
 - vii. Evaluation metrics and criteria.
 - viii. A staffing plan: please list the organization Executive Director and the Program/Project Director and their respective biographies.
 - ix. A program budget for a three-year program. Allowable expenses include but are not limited to: outreach, staffing, equipment, supplies, administrative overhead, related infrastructure, and supportive services for participants including childcare, stipends, supplies, clothing, equipment, and transportation. Grants shall be awarded for a total of \$12 million over 3 years.
- b. Letter of Inquiry Process: Letters shall be received at LincolnForward@lincoln.ne.gov no later than 5:00 pm September 30, 2021. Letters will be a matter of public record. Letters received will be reviewed by a panel of city employees and members of the Mayor's Economic Recovery Task Force. The panel will select organizations that will be invited to develop a contract with the City of Lincoln to provide a program of services specific and unique to the

organizational entity and related specifically to the eligibility criteria and expectations of the American Rescue Plan. Organizations invited to develop a contract are not guaranteed such contract.

c. Timeline:

- i. September 1-30, 2021: Letters of Inquiries Accepted
- ii. October 1 – October 15, 2021: Review of Letters of Interest
- iii. October 15- November 30, 2021: Contracts Developed with Accepted Proposals
- iv. January 1, 2022 – December 31, 2024: Programs Implemented

d. Criteria Shall Include:

- i. Alignment with the American Rescue Plan eligibility requirements for both individuals served and services provided.
- ii. Alignment with the program goals in section 3.
- iii. Experience with related programs or services.
- iv. Location and service in Lincoln, Nebraska, as well as a preference for location and service in Qualifying Census Tracts.

5. **Financial Reporting and Program Oversight**

- a. Financial Reporting: Organizations must comply with reporting requirements of the City of Lincoln and the America Rescue Plan, including but not limited to providing quarterly project and expenditure reports providing financial data, information on expenditures and eligible uses, and outcomes of the initiatives.
- b. Program Oversight: Organizations shall, at a minimum, report out the number of individuals served and successfully receiving living wage employment and/or education or training in a field directly related to an opportunity for living wage employment on an annual basis.
- c. Additional Reporting and Oversight: Additional reporting and oversight shall be required as necessary to comply with federal requirements and shall be included in detail in contracts developed with accepted organizations.

ⁱ Urban Institute: <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/cross-center-initiatives/building-americas-workforce/about/workforce-development-systems>

ⁱⁱ University of Nebraska Bureau of Business Research: https://business.unl.edu/research/bureau-of-business-research/documents/Nebraska_Business_Survey_April_2021.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Department of Labor Hiring and Training Report: <https://networks.nebraska.gov/gsipub/index.asp?docid=802>

^{iv} Greater Lincoln Workforce Development

Board: <https://www.lincoln.ne.gov/City/Mayor/Greater-Lincoln-Workforce-Development-Board>

^v Treasury Interim Final Rule: <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/FRF-Interim-Final-Rule.pdf>

^{vi} Treasury Interim Final Rule: <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/FRF-Interim-Final-Rule.pdf>

^{vii} Treasury FAQs: <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/SLFRPFAQ.pdf>

^{viii} Mayor's Economic Recovery Task Force:

https://app.lincoln.ne.gov/city/covid19/pdf/Mayor's%20Economic%20Recovery%20Task%20Force_Report.pdf

^{ix} Treasury Interim Final Rule: <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/FRF-Interim-Final-Rule.pdf>

^x Greater Lincoln Workforce Development Board:

<https://www.lincoln.ne.gov/City/Mayor/Greater-Lincoln-Workforce-Development-Board>

^{xi} Treasury Interim Final Rule: <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/FRF-Interim-Final-Rule.pdf>

^{xii} Qualified Census Tracts are a common, readily-accessible, and geographically granular method of identifying communities with a large proportion of low-income residents. Using an existing measure may speed implementation and decrease administrative burden, while identifying areas of need at a highly localized level.